

PAPERS READ

BEFORE THE

LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 1912.

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"History herself, as seen in her own workshop."

AN ITALIAN ARTIST IN OLD LANCASTER  
MINUTES OF THE MARCH MEETING

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VOL. XVI. NO. 3.

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LANCASTER, PA.  
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## AN ITALIAN ARTIST IN OLD LANCASTER.

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(LUIGI PERSICO—1820)

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With all of its many distinctions Lancaster has never been notable for lavish patronage of the fine arts. It has neither a public gallery nor private collection of famous and meritorious paintings or attractive sculpture. It would be difficult to find even a single great work in any one of the thousands of homes in this city and county which have the characteristics of culture, taste and refinement. This is somewhat due to the fact that wealth has never centered here; and no pre-eminent artist has ever sprung from or been nurtured in this community—albeit names like Grosh, Eichholtz, Armstrong, Steele, delineator of Shakespearean characters, and Brown, the incomparable miniaturist, Landis, Beck, Reingruber, Floyd, Nevin and others have had far more than merely local appreciation and popularity; not to recall Benjamin West's earlier sojourn; Sully's relations with Lancaster through his distinguished pupil, and the prolific work of Isaac L. Williams, who had Lancaster kinsfolk as well as patrons.

Nevertheless, there has always

been a very general appreciation of the aesthetic here; a popular knowledge, too, of what is meritorious in the various phases of the fine arts, and a prevailing liberal culture of taste for the beautiful. While there has been a steady development in architecture and landscape gardening, the interiors of the houses and homes in this locality show a progressive and very definite advance in decoration, the collection and display of engravings, etchings, paintings and the plastic arts.

Every generation of Lancaster people, I think, has manifested liberal patronage of portraiture; and, while the modern arts of the daguerreotype and photograph largely superseded or rather supplemented the painter's method of transmitting through time the lineaments of the loved and lost and of the honored dead, miniature and portrait painting and the silhouette, through nearly two centuries of this town's history, have always had exemplars here.

I am disposed to think no form of historical activity and art culture could be more profitably exercised at some early period than a practical study of the evolution of portraiture in Lancaster, accompanied by a popular collection and exhibition of the numberless miniatures and portraits which adorn the households of this city and county, and whose study and history would make such an admirable entertainment and valuable contribution to local art and literature.

If, for example, the co-operation of the Historical Society and the Iris Club, working through a joint committee representing both could be secured to embody in the annals of the one and to display on the walls of the other the portrait history of the families and personages who



have been perpetuated by the various artists working here from time to time, through the generations, I feel confident a most popular and instructive result would follow.

This idea was suggested, and its possibilities were brought into mind, by accidentally running across the report of the debate in the United States Senate in 1836, the last year of Jackson's Administration, when the award of a monumental work in front of the Capitol building, in Washington, to a particular Italian sculptor, was undoubtedly secured to him by reason of his residence for some years in Lancaster, nearly a century ago, and to his popularity in social circles here. Indeed, most of the earlier art works in this locality and other parts of New America were executed by Italians. In the "Lancaster Journal," August 19, 1796, it was advertised that "Mr. Peticolas paints miniatures. He completes a good likeness in two days, with not more than three hours' sitting, and asks no pay unless the likeness is acknowledged to be just."

When you visit Washington you may take a passing look at a group of sculpture on the east front of the Capitol, called by some handbooks "The Discovery," and by others known as "Columbus"—and, indeed, ridiculed by some supercilious art critics as the representation of a bowler about to "start the ball rolling." If later you get beside the great bronze doors, which are indisputably one of the best features of that splendid palace of all the arts, you will note two classic marble statues, one on either side, sometimes called "War" and "Peace," at other times, and by some authorities, called "Mars" and "Ceres." Thereby hangs a tale—indeed two tales.

**Persico's Work on the Capitol.**

Just how Luigi Persico, an Italian sculptor from Naples, secured a commission under John Quincy Adams' administration to furnish these latter two statues to the Federal Government and Capitol, I do not know; and, for the immediate purposes of this paper, it is irrelevant to inquire. Enough to note here that in a period when American sculpture had scarcely taken form, and the limit of its expression was the crude bust, only foreigners (and chiefly Italians) entered into artistic competition for anything like a complete statue or a group of sculpture. The last official act of the younger Adams, as President, was his execution of a contract with Persico, to execute these two statues for the east front of the Capitol, authorized by the appropriation bill of March 3, 1829. Each of them cost \$12,000, and the change in their location from the front to the spaces under the cornice must have been five or six years later, since it was only in 1835 that the appropriation was made to place them in the niches they now occupy. The art critics generally say they are admirable for grace and dignity of pose, strength in modeling and appropriateness. "Mars," or "War," to the left of the great central bronze doors, is panoplied in Roman mail, with sword and shield. "Ceres," or "Peace," on the right, is a woman, bearing the fruitful olive branch and ripe cluster of grapes, personification of peace. Ten years before Congress had passed this bill and the President approved the appropriation Persico was a resident of Lancaster city for some years. He was apparently well and favorably known in society and among the professional men of our town, albeit I have found no notice of him in the

contemporary local prints or histories. The official attestation of his Lancaster residence appears in the report of the Senatorial debate to which I have heretofore referred, on April 28, 1836.

#### A Senatorial Debate.

In those days there were Senatorial giants; and they were wrestling with momentous questions of internal and foreign policy which then vexed political parties and divided different sections of the country. It is cheerful to recall a Congressional discussion that involved more attractive topics than tariffs and treaties, battles with red Indians and wars upon United States banks. About the time Persico's statues, designed for the Capitol exterior, were transferred to the niches in the outer wall that have held them for three-quarters of a century, there was a project pending to complete the ornaments of the east front of the Capitol by giving some sculptor another commission to execute two new groups for the outside, to the left and right of the broad steps that now lead down toward the magnificent Congressional Library building. James Buchanan, then a United States Senator from Pennsylvania, and who for a long time had been a citizen of Lancaster, moved in the Senate to take up the resolution directing the Committee on Finance to inquire into the expediency of contracting with Luigi Persico for these groups. Preston, of South Carolina, who represented a constituency with no little art culture, favored the general idea of fitly ornamenting the Capitol, but doubted whether the Finance Committee was the appropriate body to take up the subject; and did not want the selection of an artist limit-

ed to one name. Other Senators expressed the idea that the subject fell within the scope of the Library Committee rather than of the Committee on Finance,

John C. Calhoun was then in the Senate, senior member from South Carolina; and those who have been wont to think of him as an unsentimental publicist, fixed only on ideas of disunion and nullification, will find in his contribution to the debate a Southern suggestion of "protection to home industry." He thought Congressmen "ought to reserve objects of this description for native artists; one of whom was at that time in Europe, at the head of his profession." At the solicitation of the mover, he would not make any opposition to the resolution now. "Let it go," said he, "to the committee, and let them report on it," and should their report be unfavorable he would then have an opportunity of expressing his views further on the subject. Mr. Persico he agreed, was a gentleman of talents, and would no doubt do justice to the subject; but the Government had but little patronage of the kind, and he thought they owed it to native artists to reserve it for them. Calhoun's reference to America's then leading sculptor was, of course, to Horatio Greenough, from whose hand came the first marble group executed by an American; and who, like Crawford, Powers and Story, not only recognized the necessity of studying abroad, but he and they "waited many years and endured keen disappointments before they received popular recognition in America."

Mr. Buchanan in reply paid a high compliment to Preston as an art critic; but, at that early day, he

recognized a condition confronted him, and if the House resolution, carrying the necessary appropriation, did not get to the Finance Committee at once, the whole matter would fall and fail. Then ensued what must have been to aching and waiting artists a painful parliamentary wrangle over the precedences and preferences of Congressional committees; but Mr. Preston drove deeper home the suggestion that native American art should be encouraged. "He had the highest opinion of the talents and excellence of Mr. Persico as an artist; but some of our own artists had obtained, very deservedly, great celebrity. One of them, Mr. Greenough, was soon expected home, and it might be deemed proper to give him an opportunity of exercising his talents on the contemplated work. He thought that some competition might be advantageously excited—that some little collision of mind among men of genius and taste might result in the adoption of a design more appropriate than that suggested by Mr. Persico; but of this he could not pretend to judge. The reference of such matters to persons of competent skill and acknowledged taste was necessary to prevent their being burdened with works unworthy of the nation. Their public halls had been disgraced with exhibitions purporting to be of the fine arts, utterly offensive to the public taste, absurd in design, and wretched in execution. He would vote to authorize the President of the United States to contract for suitable ornaments to complete the east front of the Capitol, instead of directing the Committee on Finance to inquire, etc."

**Persico in Lancaster.**

It was then the debate attained the point of more immediate local interest to us; and Mr. Buchanan's remarks are entitled to ample report. He said, in substance:

"No man living, sir, is willing to extend more encouragement to native talent than I am. Wherever it can fairly be brought into competition with that of foreign growth, it ought to be preferred. I am no connoisseur in sculpture, but I know that it requires immense labor, intimate knowledge of drawing, and years of experience to execute a classical or historical figure.

"There is as much difference between the artist who forms a bust, and him who executes a group of statuary, as there is between a mere portrait painter and a Michael Angelo. It is the very lowest grade of art—the commencement of the study of the profession. No gentleman, whatever may be his natural genius, who has proceeded no further than the execution of a bust, and the taking of a striking likeness, is fit to be employed in ornamenting the eastern front of our Capitol.

"It may be asked (and I answer the question now) why I feel this interest in Mr. Persico? It is from motives of private friendship, in consistence with the public good. He came to the town in which I reside in 1819, merely as a portrait painter, and for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of the English language. His genius and taste were soon discovered, and in his society I have passed many agreeable and instructive hours. He left us without a single enemy. He is not a native, but he intends to spend his days among us, for he loves liberty with all the en-

thusiasm of genius. He is devoted to the institutions of this country.

"When I next saw him, it was in New York, where his talents as a sculptor had begun to attract much attention. I asked him why he had concealed his knowledge of sculpture to his friends in Lancaster, and he replied, evincing the modesty which always accompanies true merit, that there were so many foreigners in this country who pretended to what they were not entitled that he had determined not to speak of his knowledge of this art until he should have an opportunity of displaying it by his works. He was subsequently employed by this Government at a salary of \$1,500 a year to ornament the tympanum of the eastern front of the Capitol. How he succeeded, let the universal approbation which his efforts have received decide.

"After he had completed this work, I presented a resolution to the House of Representatives, of which I was then a member, similar to the one I have now offered. He was employed; and, though I pretend to no taste in the fine arts, yet I know that others, who are competent judges, as well as myself, have been delighted with the results of his labors, and admired the industry and genius with which they were accomplished.

"The hope of identifying his talents with the Capitol of the Union has been the subject of his thoughts by day, and his dreams by night. Most keenly and deeply, therefore, would he feel, if the Senate of the United States should refuse to entertain a mere resolution of inquiry.

"Any one, whether a man of taste or not, cannot but be struck with the model of one of the groups which he has completed. It represents the

great Discoverer when he first bounded with ecstasy upon the shore; all his toils and perils past, presenting a hemisphere to the astonished world, with the name of America inscribed upon it. Whilst he is thus standing upon the shore, a female savage, with awe and wonder depicted in her countenance, is gazing upon him. This is one of the happiest, noblest, grandest conceptions of genius. It is worthy of the subject. I hope every Senator will examine the models for himself. I hazard the assertion that, if ever this work shall be finished, according to the model, it would command in Europe five times the amount which it will cost in this country. I believe, however, from the enthusiasm of the artist, that he would rather have this work of his placed on the blocking of the Capitol, if he should receive from the Government no more than a mere subsistence while engaged in its execution, than to realize a fortune from it in Europe.

"If the Senator from South Carolina desires it, let him offer a separate resolution in favor of any other artist. He shall receive my vote. I should feel indebted to him, however, if he would suffer mine to take the usual direction without any amendment."

Mr. Preston said the gentleman from Pennsylvania was mistaken if he imagined for a moment that what he said was in reference to a special competition between Mr. Persico and any other artist. He should very much regret if Mr. Persico himself thought he had said anything invidious to him. That body was not fitted to discuss these matters, as was evident from the manner in which the names of individual artists had been



brought forward. He knew that he himself was not competent to decide on them. There was, to be sure, as the gentleman from Pennsylvania observed, every difference between the execution of a correct likeness and the execution of a grand historical or allegorical subject; but he would observe *en passant* that he who copied nature most correctly in the execution of a likeness would be the most apt to succeed in the execution of a work of greater importance. By referring the decision in this matter to the President, he would most probably before deciding consult with gentlemen upon whose taste and judgment every one would be willing to rely. Washington Allston, of Boston, was one on whom he would entirely rely; and if he would say that the design of Mr. Persico was worthy of the object for which it was intended, he would be satisfied that after generations would speak of the work with the same admiration that we speak of the works of Michael Angelo. Mr. P., after referring in terms of disapprobation to the works in the rotunda of the Capitol, and particularly to the statue of Mr. Jefferson, which had got there by some means or other *per fas, aut nefas*, said that he concurred with his colleagues in wishing to reserve such works for native artists, if competent ones could be found; but if not, as expense should be no object, he would be willing to send to Thorwaldsen for a suitable work. He would rather (he said) have one such statute as that of Washington by Canova, which had been destroyed in the conflagration of the State House at Raleigh, North Carolina, than all the trash that cumbered and disgraced the walls of the rotunda. He wished it to be distinctly under-

stood that in all he said nothing was disparaging to Mr. Persico, whose talents were acknowledged on all hands. All he wished was that the decision of the matter should be left to the proper department of the Government, without saying that this particular design should be executed, or this particular artist employed, to the exclusion of all others. He, therefore, renewed his motion.

Mr. Clay said the Senator from South Carolina regarded this as a more serious matter than he could. When he heard the remarks of that Senator, from the manner in which he had exhibited his taste and knowledge of the art of sculpture, he felt as if he wished the whole matter submitted to him exclusively. Mr. Persico was well known as a superior artist, and Mr. Greenough was already employed by the Government to do an important work. To refer it to the President was a mere shifting of the responsibility from Congress to the President. If a good painter could be a good judge of sculpture, he believed there were several of them on the Committee of Finance. But really he thought there was too much importance attached to this matter; and if the President should refuse to take the responsibility of contracting for these groups, it would then be time enough for them to take it upon themselves.

Mr. Calhoun was of the opinion that they should reserve such matters for native artists, many of whom were highly distinguished. The very fact being known that they had such works in reservation for native talent would have a powerful influence in stimulating their exertions to attain excellence in their professions.

After a few remarks from Mr.

Davis, Mr. Clayton said, that whenever Mr. Greenough, or any native artist, should present himself with such a design as that presented by Mr. Persico, he would most cheerfully vote to send it to a committee for consideration. He did not consider the voting for this resolution as voting to contract for the group of statues; it was only a resolution of inquiry, and he would, therefore, vote for it.

The question was then taken on Mr. Preston's amendment, which was rejected; after which Mr. Buchanan's resolution was agreed to.

#### Awarded the Commission.

The outcome of the whole matter was that Persico got the contract—or, rather, to speak from the artistic point of view—the commission—to execute the Columbus group. The struggle, however, did not end with his champion's successful reference of the matter to the Finance Committee. I recently looked over that portion of Mr. Buchanan's voluminous correspondence which is still carefully preserved in the fire-proof departments of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, and there are many evidences of the Italian painter sculptor's gratitude to Mr. Buchanan. It appears that his Lancaster friend of old times secured thirty-eight of his colleagues in the Senate to join him in recommending Persico to President Jackson's favor. Other interests intervened, however, and for nearly a year the issue was doubtful. Persico, apprehensive of losing both statues, writes one time that he would be quite content to accept the commission for one group, and let the other be undertaken by Thorwaldsen, the great Dane, then rising into the

world's favorable view. But to lose both, Persico felt, would be most distressing after the trouble the contest had caused him and the overwhelming Senatorial recommendation he had received. Finally he writes exultingly, under date of March 31, 1837, that the President had ordered the Secretary of State to contract with him for the Columbus group; and from Philadelphia, April 10, 1837, he communicates to Mr. Buchanan, at Lancaster, his intention to leave for Italy the end of the month to begin his work; and he expresses the hope of seeing Mr. Buchanan before he sails.

Every commission of that character in that day was executed abroad; and just as Persico set out for his native country to begin his group, Hiram Powers, soon to become the second of America's great sculptors, made his first journey to Italy to study his art. He was somewhat Greenough's junior, but he preceded Story, Simms, Mills and Crawford. No American sculptor had by that time attained anything like the fame of Copley, West, Allston and Stuart in painting—the sculptor's art longer lingered. Greenough received the commission for the companion group on the east front. This was awarded to him partly because of the popular feeling for the encouragement of native genius, and somewhat owing to the favorable reports of Greenough's heroic sitting figure of Washington, on which he was then engaged in Florence. This statue was later erected in front of the Capitol, and if Persico's Columbus has been ridiculed, even severer things have been said of the pseudo-classic and half-nude effigy of the Father of the Country, who, to some

carping critics, has seemed to say: "Here is my sword, my clothes are 'n the Patent Office yonder."

Some years were required to complete Persico's work, and it was erected in 1844. The central figure is that of Columbus triumphantly holding aloft in his hand the globe. By his side cowers an Indian girl, awed at the sight of the white man. The artist copied the armor from that still preserved in Genoa, Italy—one of the many authentic suits which Columbus wore when he discovered America; and the head and face was taken from an acknowledged portrait. Greenough's group was not completed until 1851. It is entitled "The Rescue," and it tells the story of a frontiersman saving his wife and children from massacre at the hands of an Indian warrior. While these statues were projected to cost only \$8,000 each, the Government expended \$56,000 on them before their completion. Capitol work even in that early day sometimes overran expectations.

Beyond the furnishing of his last Capitol commission I have no trace of Persico. A brief notice of him and his work appears in Nagler's "Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexicon," München, 1841, Vol. II., p. 131. It refers to him as a sculptor at Naples, one of the celebrated artists who graced several churches and palaces of Italy with his works.

#### **The Champneys Correspondence.**

Mr. Buchanan's mention, in the Congressional debate, of Persico's residence in Lancaster for some years, presumably about 1820, set me to searching for some trace of it. Although, as said before, I found nothing in the local prints, nor in the official records, nor trace of his work here or in Harrisburg, you and I are

much indebted to Mr. B. C. Atlee for some interesting letters to his grandfather, the late Hon. Benjamin Champneys, from Persico, showing how devoted he was to Lancaster and to his friends in this city. Mr. Champneys was not only a professional contemporary of Mr. Buchanan, but they were then close political and personal friends. Indeed, they so long continued such that when, in 1845, Buchanan anticipated appointment by President Polk as Secretary of State, he picked out Champneys as his favorite to succeed him as United States Senator. Early in 1829 Persico seems to have gone to Harrisburg, likely to find sitters and patronage at the then new State Capital. Strange as it may seem to some of its present people, Harrisburg was then a place of much less importance than Lancaster—and, despite its present excess of population, some of our vain townsmen think the relation is not even now reversed. It is manifest from the first of the Champneys letters that our Italian artist had left his heart in Lancaster; for, as early as February 20, 1820, he writes to his good friend here in this pensive strain:

“My dear Sir—

“I am giving you the strongest proof of my esteem, making you acquainted with the most interesting object of my life.

“You will find a letter here inclosed which is open, and after having perused it, you will be so kind as to seal it, and to endeavor of giving it to the servant of that family; enjoining him to give it to her when She is alone, having received it from Harrisburg with such a request, without mentioning name.

"I leave to the care of your friendship that business, and I recommend you Secresy.

"I do not know if I will succeed, but it was for me impossible to be silent of it.

"You will find also my likeness that I promise you, and I request you my dear sir, do not give it to anybody.

"I hope you are enjoying good health, and that I will be better, of what I am now, in order to be always ready to every order of my good friend.

"Yours for ever,

"PERSICO.

"Mr. B. Champneys,

"Lancaster.

"Harrisburg, the 20th Feb. 1820."

What stirring days of tender romance and pathos to be sure those were in old Lancaster! Mind ye, the first winter's snow had just then fallen on the fresh-made grave of young Anne C. Coleman, Buchanan's betrothed, ruthlessly separated from him by giddy gossip and parental severity. Who was the fair one to whose sacred confidence the foreign artist commended Champneys? Can no trace of that old-time romance be found?

Mr. Champneys' reply must have brought some solace to our sighing swain. For a week later he writes again thus:

"My dear Sir:—

"I did believe myself unhappy in America, but I have a friend. Why have I been so late acquainted with you? I regret the lost time of my dwelling in Lancaster, before your acquaintance. You possess all the qualities requiring in true friendship. How obliging you are! How generous, and careful! From every line of

your letter flows something so delicious that has comforted me like a dropping morning dew for an arid plant. How happy I am in having you for a friend!

"Your observation about the letter I have trusted you are very reasonable. I agree perfectly with your advice, in leaving it to the Post-office.

"As you believe that the greatest faults in that letter are caused from misplaced words, I wish to leave it as it is, in order to assure her that it is my composition.

"From the issue of that letter depend on seeing again Lancaster, but by all means returning from my journey in the interior of this country, I will have the pleasure to see you again in the neighborhood of Lancaster before I leave America.

"Your for ever friend,

"L. PERSICO.

"Mr. B. Champney,

"Lancaster.

"Harrisburg, 27th, 1820.

"I pray you tell me something about W. Bead."

Then things seemed to take a more serious turn. Whether the object of his adoration here was fickle, or he suffered only that discomfort which every well-ordered person must feel—even by temporary change of residence from Lancaster to Harrisburg—does not distinctly appear. But Persico was surely blue when he wrote this:

"My dear Sir:—

"This is the first day, after having received yours, that I am able to write you. My dear friend, I have been very sick.

"I thank you for the feeling you nurse for my prosperity, but I am afraid that your conclusions were not erroneous.



"In order to assure us endeavour to ask Mr. Bead if he has received any letter from me, without mentioning him that we are in relation.

"I have not yet received any letter.

"Why do you ask me if I forgive you for your conjecture? Ah you do not know how I            you! I know from whence comes your suspicion, it from friendship spring.

"I beg pardon for a so incorrect letter I sent to you, but believe me for ever your friend,

"L. PERSICO.

"Mr. B. Champney,

Harrisburg 15th March, 1820."

If hope deferred maketh the heart sick, either there must have been slow mails to and from Harrisburg in that day, or the Lancastrian maid who still had his affections was torturing him with suspense. Lover-like, "sighing like furnace," Persico finds occasion to inquire about the subject of his solicitude in a casual letter of introduction with which he sends a Harrisburg lawyer to Lancaster:

"Dear Friend:

"I profit of the favorable opportunity in remembering me to you by the way of Mr. Forster who is going to Lancaster.

"I know not what to attribute your Silence to, I hope you are in good health, and that only your business has deterred you from writing to me.

"I am in great expect to hear from you since some time.

"Let me know Something about what interests me so much in Lancaster from which I have received no letter.

"Believe me always the same your

"L. PERSICO.

"B. Champney, esqr.,

"Harrisburg 9th May, 1820.

"P. S. The deliverer of this is one of my best friends in this place. I recommend him to you as a gentleman, being a very respectable attorney in Harrisburg.

"Excuse my bad writing, because in a haste."

#### A Literary Junta.

Manifestly Lancaster had at that time among its young lawyers and others the very profitable and now too much disused institution of a debating society. Its membership and character may be gleaned from Persico's reply to what was manifestly an interesting and newsy letter from Mr. Champneys. Under date of May 25, 1820, he writes, still from Harrisburg:

"Harrisburg, 25th May, 1820.

"My Dear Sir:—

"Never apprehend that I may forget mine Champney, all the extend of land and waters that might divide us cannot succeed to do it, altho' it is acknowledged that distance has always been followed by oblivion.

"Your definition about Love does not agree with my Situation; but it is very correct in general. My passion derives from the contemplation of the qualities which adorn my Divinity, consequently I am like Petrarch, I please myself in Solitude, and nature does not appear gloomy to my eyes; but as my Soul is continually charmed by the remembrance of her who possesses both the keys of my heart, I find new beauties in the creation. Believe me, I have never been in my life so sensible as I am now, every thing affects me, and it appears to me that if I had been more fortunate with my address I should have been intoxicated with contentment, and consequently Stunned my Senses.

"I am very much indebted to you for your goodness in informing me of the last question debated in our private Society, viz—'Ought the interest of money to be regulated by law.'

"Unfortunately you have been placed on the right side of the question, I would rather wish to see you on the affirmative of it, in order to observe whether your wit and talents could find any reason Strong enough as to sustain your task, for I believe there is none, because no law can impel on the free will of the mind. Lending has originated from necessity. Misers whose trade is lending money are very well acquainted with this truth, and when they are asked for money there is no rate which can satisfy their thirst and the established rate by law being dictated by humanity would never agree with their passion, consequently the poor necessitous having need of money is obliged to agree with them.

"The rate of interest it is established by law, but very few follow it.

"Continue to inform me of the other debates, and believe me for ever yours,

"PERSICO.

"Mr. Champney, Lancaster."

It requires little imagination to conceive what that early junta of choice literary and professional spirits meant to the little Lancaster of nearly a century ago. At this distance, one can easily believe it held the potencies of unnumbered like organizations which have risen, flourished and become extinct since; and of Cliosophic and Historical Societies Iris and Hamilton Clubs, that are still happily with us. Young Ben Champneys, be it remembered, who was to become the Democratic Rep-

representative and Judge, Senator, Attorney General of the Commonwealth and again Republican Representative and Senator, was, at the time Persico made him his confidante, scarcely twenty years of age—though he had been already two years at the Bar. His eminent professional and official career justified all the hopes of his precocious youth. His close and intimate friend and Persico's patron, James Buchanan, though scarcely thirty years of age, and only eight years at the Lancaster Bar, within that brief period had not only become a member of the House of Representatives at Harrisburg, but four years after his admission to the Bar, and in his twenty-sixth year of age, he had alone successfully defended Walter Franklin—then President Judge here—and his associates on articles of impeachment before the Senate; in the year 1820 he was elected to Congress, and in 1821 he had a professional income which exceeded in purchasing power the net figures of any single income at the Lancaster Bar to-day. Amos Ellmaker, who was also later Attorney General of Pennsylvania and a nominee for Vice President of the United States, father of the late Counsellor Nathaniel and Dr. Thomas Ellmaker, was then only eleven years at the bar; and yet he had such commanding position that he gave parental advice to Buchanan when the heartbreak of that rising statesman's first and only love threatened to unbalance, if not to overwhelm, him. Nine years earlier there had been admitted here Molton C. Rogers, destined to become Secretary of the Commonwealth, a Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and celibate ancestor of an illustrious line; and here also sought admission John Bannister Gibson, whose

fame as the Great Chief Justice of our State is the heritage of every lawyer who practices between Westminster and California. He was sprung from that hardy stock whose sign of the "Hickory Tree Tavern" swung across East King street when it was a narrow mud road through a bushy swamp. Reah Frazer, destined soon after to be a leader of the local bar, had not yet begun his law studies, but his father, William Clark Frazer, had been a practitioner here for nearly twenty years. George B. Porter, later Governor of Michigan, who built the house owned now by the Iris Club—father of the brilliant and gifted Humes Porter, who one day was highest Federal officer left in Washington—in the absence of the President and all his Cabinet—and who died in Harrisburg after living for a time at the Lancaster county public home—was a member of the local Bar in the days of which I am telling. Jasper Slaymaker had his law office in a bay window overlooking Centre Square. It was called "Solomon's Temple," and there the men "blades" of the town resorted at noon daily to gossip and take "a dish of tea"—even as they have been wont for three generations successively at Hubley's, Reigart's and the Hamilton Club to mingle their meridional wit and soda. Samuel Parke, whose special pleading later was the terror of Thaddens Stevens, was just getting ready for admission. John R. Montgomery, esteemed by his students as the most gifted lawyer of his generation, and who died in the County Insane Asylum, was yet a law student, and likewise Washington Hopkins and Emanuel C. Reigart. The leader of the Bar was James Hopkins, and one of its brightest ornaments was his brilliant pupil, William Jenkins,

who was then in the fourth of his six successive three-year terms as prosecuting attorney of Lancaster county, a tenure even exceeded in years by his own son, Richard, later District Attorney in Camden, N. J. I can fancy that any group of congenial literary spirits in Lancaster of that day, however small, must have included Dr. Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, its most popular physician, a man likewise of education, religious, political and business affairs, and then a close friend of Buchanan. Dr. Henry Carpenter, who lived to be the last medical adviser of both Stevens and Buchanan, was being born while Persico was here. Dr. John L. Atlee, first, was just starting on that marvellous and brilliant professional career which stretched over sixty-three years of Lancaster's history. His preceptor, Dr. Samuel Humes, was in the vigor of an active practice, one of the choice social spirits of the town, the repository of some secrets and even a few scandals. Dentistry was then unknown, though Lancaster was destined to later carry it to the Courts of France and raise it to profit and eminence in London.

The scholarly Endress filled the pulpit of Old Trinity. Father Hoffmeier was shepherd of the Reformed flock, midway in his long pastorate; its church aisles were laid in brick, and no stove warmed the edifice. Father Keenan was just beginning his more than half century at St. Mary's. In the Episcopal parish the ardent and saintly young Muhlenberg was in the flush of a co-rectorship which was later to be "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of another hapless love affair in the Coleman household; and, under the rectorship of Rev. Joseph Clarkson the old stone edifice of St.

James' was being replaced by the present brick structure. At the same time a like change was being completed by the Moravians on West Orange street. Rev. Sample was just at the end of a forty-year Presbyterian pastorate, signalized by enlargement and improvement of the church building, at East Orange and Cherry.

Jacob Eichholtz was setting out on that career as a portrait painter which was to bring him some fortune and more fame to him and to Lancaster; he was getting from \$25 to \$30 apiece from the Mayers, the Jenkines and the Colemans, the Hubleys, Graeffs and Shippens, the Hoffs, Porters and Humeses, for pictures now worth \$500, if extant. In the old days of the artistic armorers, masters like Michael Angelo, Titian and Cellini, Durer and Holbein, furnished designs of battle harness for horse and mail for warrior bold. Thus was "beauty made the bride of use." Like them, like Benjamin West, in his early period, and as Paul Potter, throughout his career, Eichholtz was not averse to painting a tavern sign or lettering a tradesman's transparency; and, while Persico was hunting subjects here for miniature portraits, Eichholtz was getting as much as \$35 for painting "a standard for the City Guard"—more than he received for any single portrait until years afterward.

Outside Landis' Museum, on North Queen street, there later hung a somewhat glaring copy of Sir Thomas Lawrence's, representative of John Philip Kemble as "Rolla" in the play of "Pizarro." It is doubtful whether Getz or Armstrong—both of local fame—painted this picture, which is stored in J. Augustus Beck's garret in Harrisburg. Indeed, there are some who think it was the handiwork of

Peter Lehn Grosh, the old artist of Petersburg, this county, who certainly painted the Commodore Lawrence tavern sign that swung across the Manheim turnpike, in that village, aforetime. Grosh—of whom I shall have more to say to you sometime—died in 1859, and is buried in a private burying ground along the Reading and Columbia Railroad.

When Persico was here, Lancaster's most eminent soldier of the Revolution, General Hand, had slept a dreamless sleep in the Episcopal graveyard for nearly twenty years, though he died considerably younger than I now am; and our most famous hero of the Civil War, General John F. Reynolds, was born in this same year of 1820.

John Passmore was then filling the new office of Mayor, the city having been incorporated only two years before. The Court House was in Centre Square; the county jail and workhouse within what are now the walls of Fulton Opera House, and the only market house was the open archways under the Masonic lodge room, where butcher stalls rented for \$15 per year. There were no common schools, water works nor gas; no railroads nor telegraph; no telephones nor elevators; no automobiles and joy rides—or joyless. There were no bridge whist parties nor pink teas; women's clubs or suffragettes; Christian Scientists or faith healers; neither moving pictures nor Sunday supplements—no stenographers, male or female—nor typewriters, animate and inanimate; a charter was just being obtained for the first and unsuccessful Conestoga-Slackwater navigation enterprise.

The gentlemen of Lancaster, in wigs and silver-buckled pumps, flowered waistcoats and ruffled shirtfronts,



had already been buying their cutlery, saddlery and brasses at Steinman's, and filling their snuff boxes at Demuth's for more than fifty years; and for nearly as long a time getting their brandy at Reigart's old wine store, and their spices at Heinitsh's. Country farmers were served in the taprooms of Lancaster taverns at deal tables on sanded floors, with choice Madeira in pewter pints. Landis' museum had just opened. Dramatic entertainments and concerts were usually given at the taverns of that day, far more numerous than now, and I suspect that if the debating society, whose doings Champneys reported to Persico, did not meet at the "Red Lion" or "The White Swan," it occasionally sojourned in Leonard Eichholtz's "Bull's Head" or "The Conestoga Waggon." Possibly, though, as Buchanan then owned the "Lancaster County House," that may have been the meeting place. Howe'er it be, these personages and associations of that day bespeak "no mean city," although Lancaster had scarcely 5,000 population. Even without the woman in the case, Persico might be pardoned for getting homesick for the dear old town.

#### **Persico in Philadelphia.**

Thenceforth Persico evidently lived for a time in Philadelphia, from which city he writes later to Mr. Champneys, sending thence his brother to Lancaster with this cordial introduction:

"Philadelphia, 16th, A. D. 1820.

"Dear Sir:—

"Having great many proof of your friendship I expect that taking the liberty of presenting you my brother, bearer of this, will not displease you, but will with your usual goodness show to him that I have a friend in Lancaster.

"He has some Mercantile business, and he intends to stay a few weeks in your place. He paints miniatures also. As I told you that he could play the flute, I expect that you will be pleased to play a little with him.

"I did find my trunks at stage office, and you can imagine how glad I was. You will say that to Mr. Attely.

"I need not to express you how dear I hold in heart to spend some time with you and I expect to gratify myself after a week.

"Believe me forever yours,

"L. PERSICO.

"Benjamin Champeny, Esq.,

"Lancaster."

The brother, most likely, was Gennearino Persico, a drawing master and miniature painter, who had a studio at 86 Chestnut street, Philadelphia, in 1822. He also came from Naples, and the only work of his mentioned by Westcott is a chalk drawing of Joseph Bonaparte, made in 1822. In 1823 he contracted an unfortunate marriage with Mrs. Elizabeth Kennedy, the eldest daughter of I. McKnight, cashier of the Branch Bank of Pennsylvania, at Reading, Pa. He was in Philadelphia in March, 1826, a guest at Justice Tilghman Wistar's party. Nagler does not mention Gennearino Persico, the miniature painter, and I have hunted for him in vain in other books; but he was evidently in Philadelphia in 1822-1826, teaching and painting miniatures.

During his residence in Philadelphia, and before he began his first work on the National Capitol, Luigi Persico modelled a colossal head of Lafayette, used as a decoration at the French dinner to Lafayette, at Washington Hall, in Philadelphia, October, 1824. He also modeled busts of Washington and of Dr. Nathaniel

Chapman, of Philadelphia. He is said to have designed the liberty head for the United States coins of 1826; but I am doubtful as to this statement. Mr. Charles Barber, engraver at the Mint, advises me that the design of the 1826 coinage was used upon the half dollars from 1808 to 1839, on the quarter dollar from 1815 to 1839, and on the dime and half-dime from 1809 to 1839. Robert Scott is supposed to have engraved the dies. In the old Mint there was a plaster model bearing the name E. Luigi Persico. It was of a Liberty head that very much resembled the head upon the coins stated above; whether it was furnished the Mint engraver to be copied for the coins mentioned, Mr. Barber has no means of knowing. William Kneass, born in Lancaster in 1781, was appointed engraver of the Mint in 1824, but these dies were made before his time; and, much as I would like to, I cannot indulge the pleasant fancy that Kneass and Persico knew each other in Lancaster, and that their acquaintance here resulted in the adoption of Persico's design for the coinage.

#### **Designed by the Second Adams.**

Just how Persico got from Philadelphia to Washington, about 1827, I have not traced; but it is certain he attracted the attention of John Quincy Adams and had the sympathetic support of Mr. Buchanan when the last-named was a Representative from this district. Persico's decoration of the pediment above the central steps on the eastern facade of the Capitol, to which Mr. Buchanan referred in the Senate, was designed by John Quincy Adams himself. The semi-colossal figure in the center represents the "Genius of America." This

work is carved in alto relievo from durable Virginia sandstone, and it was finished just before the meeting of Congress in 1828. In his diary, Adams makes the following entry for June 30 of that year:

"Overtaken by a storm near the Capitol, and took shelter under one of the arches. Found Mr. Persico, the Italian sculptor there, and went up to view his work at the pediment, of which I furnished him the design. He is now upon the last figure, Hope; and thus far his execution is very satisfactory. His eagle had been indifferent in the drawing; better, but not good, in the model. In the work itself it is the pouncing bird. He called my attention to the anchor; he had, therefore, gone to Commodore Pingey and taken for his model a true anchor of a ship of war; 'And so now,' he said, 'whenever a sailor looks at this pediment he will say, "How exact the anchor is!"' He said he would paint the scales in the hand of Justice White; they must be painted to prevent them taking the rain, making verdigris, and dropping it upon the stone figures."

In an extract from a letter written June 22, 1825, by Bullfinch, then the architect of the Capitol, he says:

"Our work at the Capitol proceeds but slowly, owing to the delay of contractors in delivering the large blocks for columns. We have received only 4 this season, which are raised into their places, and must have 7 more before the much talked of Pediment can be commenced. With respect to the ornament proposed to decorate this, the artists in general feel very much disappointed; about 30 persons presented 36 designs, some well and others badly executed, but none answering the President's idea of a suitable decoration for a legislative

building. He disclaimed all wish to exhibit triumphal cars and emblems of victory, and all allusion to heathen mythology, and thought that the duties of the Nation or of Legislators should be impressed in an obvious and intelligible manner. After several attempts, the following has been agreed upon: a figure of America occupies the centre, her right arm resting on the shield inscribed "U. S. A.," supported by an altar or pedestal bearing the inscription, July 4, 1776, her left hand pointing to the figure of Justice, who, with unveiled face, is viewing the scales, and the right hand presenting an open scroll inscribed Constitution, March 4, 1789; on the left of the principal figure is the eagle, and a figure of Hope resting on her anchor, with face and right hand uplifted—the whole intended to convey that while we cultivate Justice we may hope for success. The figures are bold, of 9 feet in height, and gracefully drawn by Mr. Persico, an Italian artist. It is intended that an appropriate inscription shall explain the meaning and moral to dull comprehensions."

Hazleton's "National Capitol," which prints these interesting extracts, also notes that the cost of this work to the government, though the design of the President was gratuitous, was \$15,000. Soon after its completion, a part of the arm of the figure of Justice, together with the Constitution, fell from the action of frost to the steps of the portico, and was shattered into fragments.

While Persico was at this work he evidently moved in the select social circles at the National Capital. Mrs. Margaret Bayard Smith, in her very readable "First Forty Years of Washington Society," speaks of meeting

Persico at a wedding reception, where the bride was such a ravishing beauty that the English Minister "seemed as if he could eat her up; and if eyes could have eaten he would have devoured her." Persico she records, more politely, though quite as loyally, "begged permission of her father to take her bust which he says is faultless, perfectly classical." The lady's maiden name was Williams; with characteristic indifference the woman historian forgets to tell us whom she married, although she found him "a handsome and pleasing young man." Whether Persico realized his desire to perpetuate this "mould of form" I do not know.

I also find traces of his social position in a letter from him to Mr. Stanberry, on the eve of packing up to go to Italy to execute his commission. He found a book loaned to him by Miss Augusta Stanberry, which he returns with a polite apology for his delay—a laudable custom that modern book borrowers too often honor only in the breach.

In connection with the fidelity with which Persico seems to have always wrought, and the especially patriotic enthusiasm he had for portraying his immortal and now sainted fellow-countryman, the "Discoverer," it is to be noticed that in the wide plaza in front of the magnificent new Union Station, in Washington, there is now being erected and will be unveiled in May an imposing and costly Columbus memorial, of elaborate design.

#### **Immortality of Genius.**

On the occasion of a recent visit to Washington I had the opportunity to verify the descriptions I have cited of Persico's work on the National Capitol. Brief as was his residence

in Lancaster, and fragmentary as our memories of him are, it gratified local historical pride to observe that of the five great sculptures which occupy the most conspicuous places in the very centre and forefront of that splendid architectural pile, four are the work of one whom our town claimed as a resident and who was patronized by its people of an earlier day.

It is somewhat to the nation's discredit—not to the artist's—that time and exposure, neglect and vandalism after long years have mutilated in a degree the grace and beauty of his work. On close inspection Ceres presents a rueful aspect—her eyelids chipped, both hands broken off and her luscious bunch of grapes crushed and wineless at her feet. The blade of the short sword in the hand of the God of War is broken, and he grasps only the hilt, while the missing tip of his marble nose mars his Roman beauty. The material of the Columbus group seems to have been too delicate to stand all the ravages of exposure and the garment that swathes the limbs of the Indian girl has a moth-eaten look. The work of his American compeer has lasted better; it seems to have been wrought in more enduring marble, but I doubt whether, when first erected, it had the exquisite finish of Persico's. Viewed from below the elaborate Adams-Persico group seems to be intact; the lame arm of Justice apparently has been mended with a skill that should satisfy the most exacting and rough-riding censor of the Courts.

The same occasion gave me an opportunity to slightly correct the Bullfinch description of the pediment which I have quoted. The scroll in

the right hand of the figure personifying America is not inscribed "Constitution, March 4, 1789," as he and some of the guide books say. The inscription is "Constitution, 17 September, 1787"—the date of signing the Federal charter; not the time it became effective. Historical societies must be accurate, even if guide books are not.

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If it be complained that this all too protracted and discursive sketch has little of real local interest, let it be pleaded in extenuation that no phase of our early history is alien to the scope of this society's work; the best purpose of this study may be to stimulate inquiry into other historical remains, of this notable artist's residence here and of his work during his stay, and perchance other local art productions of that period. Further of his correspondence may be elicited and some of his work may be called out from chambers where it has hung too long neglected. Even if all other trace of him be lost, his luckless love for one of the belles and beauties of 1820 of "the town we live in" may serve to inspire some gifted genius who is yet to bring forth that long-tarrying romance of old Lancaster. Who knows but when that (to be) greatest historic event of our local experience—the celebration of our municipal centennial in 1918—shall stir the hearts of our proud county's 200,000 people, as the youthful Chatterton brought out of the Rowleyan chests of St. Mary Radcliffe the legends of old Bristol, some inglorious Milton, playing in the streets to-day, a

"Whining school boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping  
like snail  
Unwillingly to school,"



shall exhume from Lancaster's richness of romance the story of how Persico loved and lost; or tell in tuneful measures how thenceafter, all through life, he carried in his heart the memory of that Lancaster "divinity" with whose charm, like Petrarch, he "pleased himself in solitude" at Harrisburg—until even in that mephitic atmosphere "nature did not appear altogether gloomy" to the eyes of his sick soul! Who can doubt that, after and because of that episode in his residence here, his hand, like that which

"Rounded Peter's dome,  
And groined the aisles of ancient  
Rome,  
Wrought with a sad sincerity."

Who will gainsay that, in all his later work, his fancy saw her as when there

"Smiled upon Praxiteles  
The Phryne whom he loved."

For through all time it has been true that

"The world uncertain comes and goes."  
"The lover rooted stays."

## Minutes of the March Meeting

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Lancaster, Pa., March 8, 1912.

The regular monthly meeting of the Lancaster County Historical Society was held this evening, having been postponed from the first Friday evening of the month.

President Steinman presided, and the attendance of members and visitors was unusually large, the assembly room being completely filled and a number of persons standing.

Miss Bausman, the librarian, reported the following donations during February:

Bound Volumes—General John Sullivan's Indian Expedition, 1779, from Mr. John C. Fiero; twenty-fifth annual report of the Interstate Commerce Commission, 1911; "Cherished Memories of Old Lancaster, Town and Shire," by William Riddle, from Mr. Riddle; History of the Moravian Church in America, from Mr. George Steinman.

Magazines and Pamphlets—Religious Convictions and Character of James Buchanan, by W. U. Hensel, presented by Mr. Hensel; County Government in Colonial North Carolina, from North Carolina Historical Society; Penn Germania for February, 1912; Bulletins of the New York Public Library, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Grand Rapids Public Library for January and February, Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore; twenty-sixth annual report of the Enoch Pratt Free Library; two numbers of International Conciliation; fifteen pamphlets of the "Pro-

ceedings" of the Lancaster County Historical Society, from Miss Hannah Holbrook; photograph, birthday souvenir and poems, from Mr. D. B. Landis; genealogical chart of the descendants of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, containing over a thousand names, from Yale University Library; Historical Atlas of Lancaster County, 1875, and Atlas of Cumberland County, 1872, from L. B. Bausman.

A vote of thanks was extended the several donors.

The following persons were proposed for membership: George S. Franklin, this city; George H. Rothermel, 343 West King street, this city; C. A. Sauber, 221 South Queen street, this city; J. G. Rush, West Willow; Dr. J. M. Baum, Ephrata, and M. G. Weaver, New Holland.

A letter from the Woman's Club of Columbia, calling attention to the movement for the placing of a tablet to mark the burning of the Columbia bridge was read and ordered filed.

The paper of the evening was submitted by Mr. W. U. Hensel, who had as his subject, "An Italian Artist in Old Lancaster—Luigi Persico, 1820." It was enjoyed with keen interest by the large audience.

Previous to his paper Mr. Hensel read a poem written by Lloyd Mifflin and suggested by the paper prepared by Mr. F. R. Diffenderffer, and read before the January meeting of the society on "The Conestoga River."

There was a discussion of the paper participated in by Rev. Dr. J. Max Hark, former pastor of the Moravian Church here, now located in Bethlehem, and others. The author was extended a vote of thanks for his excellent production.

Carrying out a suggestion made by Mr. Hensel in his paper, the Historical Society authorized the president to

appoint a committee to act in conjunction with a committee of the Iris Club to plan for a display of the portrait history of the families and personages who have been perpetuated by the various artists working here from time to time. Members of the Iris Club who were present this evening heartily endorsed the idea and the club will take action at its next meeting. The display or exhibition will be held some time next fall.

Adjournment.







